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When High Group Status Becomes a Burden

Requesting Outgroup Help and Spying by Members of High and Low Status Groups

Susanne Täuber¹ and Esther van Leeuwen²

¹University of Groningen, The Netherlands, ²VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Abstract. The present paper investigates the strategic motives that guide the quest for outgroup resources. Resources can be retrieved through spying and requesting help. Whereas both methods are means of obtaining valued resources from the outgroup, spying secures the ingroup's public image, while requesting help potentially damages this image by displaying the ingroup as incompetent and dependent. Two experiments ($N = 99$ and $N = 99$) supported the prediction that, when social change is feasible, members of high status groups spy more on the lower status group than vice versa. No difference was found in either study in the amount of help requested from the outgroup. Results from the second study showed that the effect did not occur when status relations were legitimate and thus unlikely to change. These findings advance our understanding of intergroup helping by demonstrating that strategic motives fundamentally shape aspects of help-seeking between groups.

Keywords: intergroup helping, visibility, social costs, stability of status relations, perceived threat

Two determinants of status differentials between groups are knowledge and know-how, which are becoming increasingly important in the globalized world, because they provide the holder with power and standing (Wegener, 1992). The production, legitimization, control, and dissemination of knowledge has been shown to reflect status hierarchies both globally (Vorster & Nel, 1995) and within organizations (Wong, Ho, & Lee, 2008). Interestingly, existing status differentials based at least partly on knowledge are also often challenged precisely because the dissemination of knowledge is more difficult to control than, say, the distribution of weapons. Intelligence services assert that espionage is on the increase worldwide, and that one of the most attractive targets is know-how. According to *The Guardian*, the British counterintelligence service MI5 states that

In the past, espionage activity was typically directed toward obtaining political and military intelligence. In today's high-tech world, the intelligence requirements . . . include new communication technologies, IT, genetics, aviation, . . . and many other fields. (Norton-Taylor, 2010)

Nevertheless, to date research has paid little attention to group members' motivation to spy on or to request help from an outgroup in order to maintain or improve the position of their ingroup. The present paper aims to fill this gap.

The intended consequences of both requesting help and spying are to provide the ingroup with resources needed to maintain or to improve its status position. However, whereas requesting help is potentially damaging to the group's public image, spying diminishes this potential because this behavior cannot be witnessed by the outgroup. Spying therefore provides an intriguing way to vary the social costs of falling back on another group's resources while keeping its instrumental value constant.

The Psychological Consequences of Seeking Help

While there is evidence that the willingness to help others can rest upon empathic concerns (Batson, 1994) and beliefs of reciprocity (Hardy & van Vugt, 2006), others have demonstrated more strategic motives (Hopkins et al., 2007; Nadler, Harpaz-Gorodeisky, & Ben-David, 2009; van Leeuwen, 2007; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010). Strategic motives for providing help to an outgroup include motivations to exert power (Nadler, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2006), to create a favorable impression of one's group (van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010), and to restore the meaningfulness of

a threatened group identity (van Leeuwen, 2007; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010). Complementing prior research regarding strategic motives that drive attempts to provide outgroups with help, the present research investigates the strategic motives that drive attempts to benefit from the outgroup's knowledge. Specifically, the present paper focuses on preferences for requesting help and spying on the outgroup among members of high and low status groups when the existing status hierarchy is subject to change.

Seeking help can elicit feelings of dependence and inferiority (Gilbert & Silvera, 1996), and can have adverse effects on self-esteem (Nadler, 1991). Consequently, people often refrain from seeking support even when they clearly are in need of it (Schneider, Major, Luhtanen, & Crocker, 1996; Wills & DePaolo, 1991). Requests for help appear to encompass two dimensions: The first dimension defines the current status difference based on resources such as technology, knowledge, or materials, thereby emphasizing the instrumental value of seeking help. The second dimension defines group status with regard to the public image of a group, thereby emphasizing the social costs of seeking help. These two dimensions are inevitably intertwined because increases in the instrumental value of help are often accompanied by increases in the social costs associated with requesting this help (Nadler, 2002). The question why the groups involved refrain from just asking for the desired resources might be answered by the interplay between the instrumental value of the outgroup's resources and the social costs associated with help.

Who Is in Need When Status Relations Are Subject to Change?

Within research on intergroup helping relations, the overarching assumption is that members of low status groups have little to offer to high status groups. The model of intergroup helping relations as power relations (Nadler, 2002) holds that high status groups would not seek help from low status groups irrespective of whether the groups' status positions are subject to change. However, research indicates that in certain situations high status groups can be in even greater need of resources than low status groups. For instance, potential changes to the existing status hierarchy have been shown to be more demanding on members of high status groups (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). The prospect of change threatens the group's advantaged position because it implies the risk of losing their positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Brown, 1978).

Moreover, members of high status groups face higher performance expectations than members of low status groups. The need to deliver high performance might further enhance the need to seek help from the lower status outgroup. We therefore propose that, especially with regard to

novel domains of knowledge, unstable status relations constitute a serious dilemma for high status groups: Group members can decide either to request the outgroup's resources at the expense of their own group's public image or to secure their public image (by not requesting the outgroup's resources) at the expense of their own group's resource-based status. Neither option secures their relative standing. Thus, high group status can become a burden to group members because the prospect of changing status relations emphasizes the risk of losing one's advantaged position.

The Strategic Aspects of Seeking Help

Consistent with prior research (Nadler, 2002; Nadler & Halabi, 2006; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010; van Leeuwen, Täuber, & Sassenberg, *in press*), we suggest that seeking help from another group potentially conveys the impression that the ingroup is dependent on and inferior to the outgroup. Falling back on the outgroup's resources is associated with social costs to the extent that this can be witnessed by the outgroup. Consequently, the social costs involved in seeking another group's resources differ substantially depending on whether this behavior is overt (requesting help) or covert (spying).

This proposition is consistent with research on providing support. Because providing support reflects positively on the provider, the willingness to give support should increase when an audience is present to witness this behavior. Research has indeed shown that visibility strongly affects the willingness to give help (Campbell & Slack, 2006; Haley & Fessler, 2005). For example, Campbell and Slack (2006) found that highly visible organizations give more cash donations than less visible organizations, as determined by comparing the organization's giving rate in relation to their pretax profits (Campbell & Slack, 2006). In fact, the effects of behavioral visibility on helping are so ingrained that mere cues of an audience are enough to trigger more generous behavior, even when behavior in effect remains anonymous (Haley & Fessler, 2005).

Conversely, the willingness to request resources should decrease when an audience is present to witness this behavior, because it potentially reflects negatively upon the requesters' reputation due to its connotations with inferiority and dependency (Gilbert & Silvera, 1996; Nadler, 2002). This assumption received empirical support with respect to interpersonal requests for help. Ryan, Pintrich, and Midgley (2001) showed that pupils who were in need of support avoided seeking help due to concerns about their public self-esteem. With regard to intergroup contexts, however, research has not yet investigated the impact of visibility on the willingness to request resources from an outgroup. Moreover, the possibility that members of high status groups might fall back on the resources of a lower status group by requesting resources has not yet been addressed.

The Present Research

Based on the observation that potential changes to the existing status hierarchy are more demanding for members of high compared to low status groups, we expect that members of high and low status groups would differ in their preferences for requesting help and spying on the outgroup. Specifically, we propose that, when structural features of the intergroup context indicate that the status hierarchy is subject to change, spying is preferred over requesting help, and this relation will be more pronounced among members of high compared to low status groups. Of particular interest in our studies is therefore not the overall difference between the amount of overt vs. covert information seeking, but how this difference is moderated by group status.

We developed an experimental paradigm that allowed us to vary whether quests for information from the outgroup are overt vs. covert. With this paradigm, the instrumental value of the outgroup's resources was kept constant, while the social costs that accompany the pursuit of these resources were varied experimentally. We conducted two studies to investigate the impact of group status on preferences for requesting help vs. spying. The intergroup context was described (Study 1) and manipulated (Study 2) in such a way that it emphasized the feasibility of changes to the experimentally created status differential.

Study 1

Study 1 compared preferences for requesting help vs. spying between members of experimentally created low and high status groups. It was hypothesized that preferences for spying over requesting help would be more pronounced among members of high compared to low status groups.

Method

Participants and Design

A group of 99 students of the VU University Amsterdam (VU; 64 women, 35 men, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.00$, $SD = 3.78$) took part in the experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 2 (Group Status: high vs. low) \times 2 (Help Type: requesting vs. spying) between-subjects design.

Procedure and Dependent Measures

Upon entering the laboratory, participants were seated in closed cubicles in front of a computer that was used to

present instructions, tasks, and questions, and to register the answers. Participants were told that they were part of a team of three students of the VU that was connected with a team of three students of the University of Amsterdam (UA). Because only these two universities exist in Amsterdam, categorization as a student of one or the other provides meaningful group boundaries for the participants. A competitive setting was induced by asking participants to try to answer more questions correctly than the UA team in the knowledge quiz. We introduced an additional goal by announcing that the teams' joint performance would be compared to that of other paired teams from different university cities. We thereby created a situation that contained both competitive and cooperative motives, with the goal of making requests for the outgroup's resources more plausible. Further, to avoid personal outcomes coming into focus, it was emphasized that participants' outcomes (i.e., points gained in the knowledge quiz) were entirely group-based.

In a first round, participants took part in a knowledge quiz consisting of 15 questions adapted from Trivial Pursuit.¹ In order to lend credibility to the performance feedback that would be provided afterward (the group status manipulation), the questions presented to participants in the low group status condition were, unbeknown to the participants themselves, pretested to be somewhat more difficult than those presented to participants in the high status condition. After this first task it was announced that the VU team had performed better (in the high status condition) or worse (in the low status condition) than the UA team.

Following the status manipulation, a second round of the knowledge task was announced, for which participants again were asked to outperform the other group. It was explained that members of both teams would have the opportunity to seek answers from the other team if they did not know the answer to a question themselves. Participants could decide for each knowledge question to either answer it on their own or to seek the answer from the other team. Participants in the *requesting help condition* were informed that, upon requesting an answer, a message would be created to be presented to the other team at the end of the task (in order not to interrupt them), in which they were requested to share their answer. In order to ensure comparability with the spying condition, participants in the requesting help condition were assured that their requests for help could not be denied by the other team. Participants in the *spying condition* were informed that, when seeking an answer from the other team, the other team would not be aware of their request. The requested answers would automatically be collected from the data file in which the other team's answers were stored and sent to participant's team without the knowledge of the other team.

¹ The difficulty of all Trivial Pursuit questions used in this experiment was pretested.

During this second round, 30 questions of medium difficulty were presented to the participants. Consequently, the second task became easier compared to the first task in the low group status condition, whereas it became more difficult in the high group status condition. This procedure was intended to create a sense of instability of status positions.² Participants were also informed that the requests sent to their team from the other team would be stored in a separate file until their own team had finished working on the knowledge quiz. With this procedure, we aimed to prevent reciprocity issues from affecting the data collection.

Following the Trivial Pursuit game, a brief questionnaire was administered. Two questions (1 = *not well at all*, 7 = *very well*) examined whether the status manipulation was successful ("How well did the VU team perform during the first task?" and "How well did the UA team perform during the first task?"). One question (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) examined whether participants correctly perceived that the other group was aware or unaware of their quests for resources ("To what extent were members of the UA team aware of the number of times their answers were requested?").

Results

Unless otherwise indicated, all variables were analyzed in separate analyses of variance with "Group Status" and "Help Type" as between-subject factors. All significant effects are reported. Significant interactions were further explored using tests for simple main effects.

Manipulation Checks

A main effect of Group Status was found for the perception of ingroup performance, $F(1, 95) = 119.91, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .56$. Participants in the high group status condition indicated to a greater extent that their team performed better than the other team ($M = 5.20, SD = 0.86$) than did participants in the low group status condition ($M = 2.82, SD = 1.27$). A main effect of Group Status was also observed for the perception of outgroup performance, $F(1, 95) = 140.58, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .60$. Participants in the high group status condition indicated that the other team performed better than their own team to a lesser extent ($M = 3.28, SD = 0.76$) than did participants in the low group status condition ($M = 5.14, SD = 0.82$). The outgroup's perceived awareness of the ingroup's requests also yielded a main effect of Help Type, $F(1, 95) = 21.68, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .19$. Participants in the requesting help conditions indicated awareness of the outgroup that information was being requested to a greater

extent ($M = 3.47, SD = 1.50$) than did participants in the spying conditions ($M = 2.04, SD = 1.53$). In conclusion, the manipulations of both Group Status and Help Type can be considered successful.

Seeking Answers

The analysis of the number of times an answer was sought revealed a main effect of Help Type, $F(1, 95) = 27.83, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .23$, which was qualified by the expected interaction with Group Status, $F(1, 95) = 4.58, p = .035, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Participants were in general more willing to spy on the outgroup ($M = 15.72, SD = 5.40$) than to request help ($M = 10.65, SD = 4.40$), but this pattern was more pronounced among members of high compared to low status groups. Figure 1 depicts the relevant means. Members in the high group status conditions spied more answers ($M = 17.68, SD = 5.78$) than members in the low group status conditions ($M = 13.76, SD = 4.26$), $F(1, 95) = 7.46, p = .005, \eta_p^2 = .14$, whereas no difference was found between high and low status groups in the amount of requested help, $F(1, 95) = 0.02, ns$. This finding supports the prediction that salience of social costs has a stronger impact on willingness to seek outgroup resources among members of high compared to low status groups.

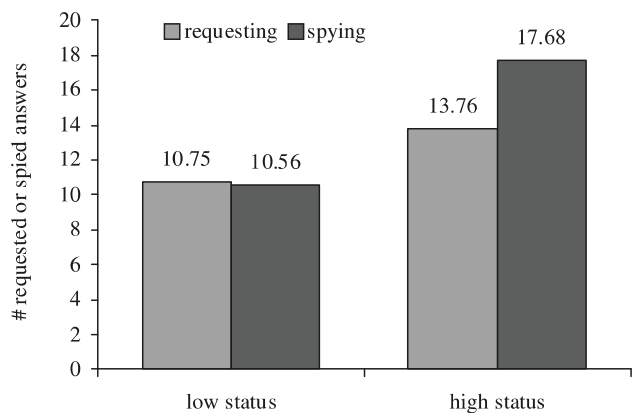


Figure 1. Preferences for seeking help vs. spying as a function of Group Status, Study 1.

Consistent with expectations, the quest for answers was highest among participants in the high group status condition when the social costs associated with this behavior were low and thus when spying was possible. In fact, participants in this condition spied on the outgroup for significantly more than 15 out of 30 questions, $t(24) = 2.32, p = .029$.

² We can indeed show that, with regard to the first set of 15 questions, significant differences exist for the number of questions answered correctly, $F(1, 97) = 118.74, p < .001$. Participants in the high group status condition answered more questions correctly ($M = 7.80, SD = 2.44$) compared to participants in the low group status condition ($M = 3.04, SD = 1.86$). With regard to the second set of 30 questions, no difference between the high and low group status condition was found with regard to the number of questions answered correctly, $F(1, 97) < 1.50, ns$.

Discussion

Study 1 provided an explicit test of the proposition that the social costs associated with seeking outgroup resources exert a greater impact on members of high than of low status groups. The findings support our notion that challenges to the existing status hierarchy create a stronger need for the resources of other groups among members of high compared to low status groups. Members of the high status groups spied significantly more on the lower status outgroup than vice versa, indicating that members of high status groups are aware of the dilemma they face when the status hierarchy is subject to change: They need the resources of the outgroup in order to preserve their advantaged standing, though requesting resources in itself potentially impairs their public image by communicating dependence on the outgroup. In summary, whereas a general preference to spy on over requesting help from the outgroup was evident, this preference was much more pronounced among members of the high status group.

Why did members of a low status group not take the chance to improve their group's relative standing, especially when falling back on the outgroup's resources was associated with low social costs (i.e., when they could spy)? Nadler's (2002) model of intergroup helping relations as power relations offers a plausible interpretation of this finding. When status differentials are stable, members of low status groups are expected to be willing to seek help from the higher status outgroup. Therefore, we believe that the observed reluctance to seek help from the higher status outgroup's can be interpreted as an attempt to challenge the experimentally created status differential. This view is supported by the general greater willingness to spy on the outgroup than to request help evident across status conditions: It indicates that members of low status groups are also concerned about their group's public image.

An alternative explanation for our findings is that participants acted according to what they *perceived* as normative when belonging to a group publicly known as having high or low knowledge. Thus, participants might have inferred what is normative behavior from their belonging to a high or a low status group. Groups that have knowledge should mainly provide, but not request answers, whereas groups with less knowledge should mainly request answers. However, if this alternative explanation were responsible for our findings, we would have expected a main effect of group status on the overall level of requests for answers in the opposite direction to what was evident.

Study 2

The first study investigated the prediction that, when status relations are subject to change, members of high status groups experience a greater need for the instrumental benefits of help, yet are more reluctant to request it out of fear of damaging their good reputation. Study 2 was set up to experimentally examine the assumption that such a dilemma exists mainly when social change is feasible, but not when status relations are unlikely to change. We therefore manipulated the legitimacy of the status distinction in Study 2. When status relations are legitimate, group members are more likely to accept the status quo. By contrast, when status differences are viewed as illegitimate, members of low status groups might be challenged by the prospect of change, whereas members of high status groups may experience threat and be motivated to preserve the status quo (Ellemers, Wilke, & van Knippenberg, 1993).³

The paradigm used in the second study was comparable to that used in the first study, with the exception that information seeking was manipulated within subjects. Participants were given the opportunity to request outgroup help, spy on the outgroup, or attempt to answer the knowledge questions by themselves. Based on the results from the first study, we did not expect to find a difference regarding the amount of requests for help. However, with respect to spying, we expected that members of high status groups would spy more on the outgroup when status relations are illegitimate compared to when they are legitimate, whereas no such difference was expected for members of low status groups. Consequently, members of illegitimate high status groups were expected to answer fewer questions by themselves than members of legitimate high status groups, whereas the reverse pattern was expected for members of low status groups.

Method

Participants and Design

A group of 99 students of the VU University Amsterdam (VU; 66 women, 33 men, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.21$, $SD = 4.58$) took part in the experiment. Participants were randomly assigned to the conditions of a 3-way mixed design with Group Status (high vs. low) and Legitimacy (high vs. low) as between-subjects factors and Help Type (request vs. spy vs. no help) as within-subjects factor.

³ On a theoretical note, we do not intend to equate instability of status differences (Study 1) with illegitimacy of status differences (Study 2). However, previous theorizing on intergroup helping relations (Nadler, 2002) assumes that instability and illegitimacy have essentially the same effects on help-seeking. Similarly, based on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978), Ellemers (1993) argued that perceived illegitimacy of group status might increase the impression that the status hierarchy is unstable, and that perceived instability of group status might diminish the perception that the status differential is legitimate.

Procedure and Dependent Measures

The procedure was similar to that of Study 1, with a few exceptions: Group membership was based on region of residence, instead of university. Participants were first asked to indicate in which region of The Netherlands they currently studied: North, East, South, or West. All participants (correctly) indicated studying in the West (= ingroup). Participants were informed that they were part of an online national survey into the geographical spread of knowledge in the country. After a short waiting period, they were connected to 2 other students from their own region to form a 3-person team ("Team West"). It was explained that the performance of Team West would be compared to another 3-person team from a randomly chosen other region (East, North, or South). In the first round of the knowledge quiz, each team member would be presented with 15 multiple choice knowledge questions, each with four answer options. Contrary to Study 1, questions in the high group status condition were identical to those in the low group status condition. The total number of correct answers within each team would constitute the team's performance or knowledge level, which would be compared to that of the other team that had worked on the same task.

Upon finishing the first task, participants learned that the national average performance was 29 correct answers (out of 45). Next, they could click on a graph after which the teams' performance levels were displayed. Participants' team always received a score of 37 or 21, which always differed either 1 point (illegitimate status difference) or 17 points (legitimate status difference) from the other team. In the *legitimate low group status condition*, participants learned that their team had a total of 21 correct answers, compared to 38 for the other team. The participants' team had thus not only performed worse than the other team, but also below the national average, whereas the other team had performed above the national average. In the *illegitimate low group status condition*, participants were informed that their team had a total of 37 correct answers, compared to 38 for the other team. In both conditions, the program continued by concluding that, because the participants' team was outperformed by the other team, the participants' team would from there on be referred to as "the worse team" and the other team as "the better team."

Although participants' team in the illegitimate condition was still outperformed by the other team, the difference was small; more importantly, the participants' team had performed above the national average, which would render the label "worse team" as unjustified and illegitimate. In the *legitimate high group status condition*, the scores were 37 for participants' team and 20 for the other team, and in the *illegitimate high group status condition*, the scores were 21 for participants' team and 20 for the other team, and participants' team was always referred to as "the better team."

With this procedure, we closely followed the experimental procedure employed by Ellemers (1993). Specifically, our procedure followed the notion that status differences

are perceived as illegitimate when they do not reflect differences in competence (see Ellemers, 1993, p. 48). Participants in the illegitimate status conditions learned that their group's competence differed only by one point from the other group's competence, a difference that did not justify the assignment of higher or lower group status.

The second task was then introduced, including the opportunity to request information from the other team. The task consisted of 30 multiple-choice questions. Participants were given three behavioral options with each knowledge question:

1. To send a message to the other team requesting their answer (*request*),
2. to get the other team's answer without their knowledge (*spy*),
3. to answer the question by themselves without aid (*no help*).

Participants learned that if they would seek an answer from the other team (either as a request or through spying), the question could be skipped for the moment and be completed at the end of the quiz. Parallel to the procedure of Study 1, if they decided to spy on the other group, the requested answers could automatically be collected from the data file in which the other team's answers were stored and sent to participant's team without the knowledge of the other team. As in Study 1, we emphasized that participants' outcomes were entirely group based.

Upon finishing the second round, the group filled out a short questionnaire. Performance feedback was checked by asking participants the extent to which they agreed with the statements (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *very much*) that "... their own team's performance in the first round was considerably higher than the national average" (*ingroup performance*), and that "... the other team's performance in the first round was considerably higher than the national average" (*outgroup performance*). The *perceived legitimacy* of the status difference was assessed with four items (e.g., "The distinction between a high knowledge team and a low knowledge team as introduced after the first round is not entirely justified," "I did not agree with the classification of my team as a team with high/low knowledge"; 1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*). The items were averaged into a single scale ($\alpha = .81$). Perceived *ingroup knowledge* was assessed with one item ("How much knowledge do you think the members of your own team possess?"; 1 = *very little*, 7 = *very much*). After finishing the questionnaire, participants were paid, thanked, and debriefed.

Results

Unless otherwise indicated, all variables were analyzed in full factorial analyses of variance with Group Status and Legitimacy as independent variables. All significant effects

are reported. Significant interactions were further explored using tests for simple main effects.

Manipulation Checks

Analysis of *ingroup performance score* revealed a significant interaction, $F(1, 95) = 246.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .72$. Participants in the low group status condition more strongly agreed with the statement that their own team's performance was higher than the national average when the status difference was illegitimate ($M = 5.21, SD = 1.41$) than when it was legitimate ($M = 1.70, SD = 0.87$), $F(1, 95) = 117.60, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .55$. Participants in the high group status condition less strongly agreed with this statement when the status difference was illegitimate ($M = 1.86, SD = 1.08$) than when it was legitimate ($M = 5.65, SD = 1.19$), $F(1, 95) = 129.01, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .58$. Analysis of *outgroup performance* revealed a significant main effect of Group Status, $F(1, 95) = 81.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .43$. Participants in the low group status condition more strongly agreed with the statement that the other team's performance was higher than the national average ($M = 5.47, SD = 1.39$) than did participants in the high group status condition ($M = 2.08, SD = 1.50$). These results show that participants accurately understood and recalled the performance feedback.

Analysis of *ingroup knowledge* yielded a main effect of Group Status, $F(1, 95) = 5.14, p = .026, \eta_p^2 = .05$. Participants in the high group status condition indicated that their own team was more knowledgeable ($M = 4.10, SD = 0.90$) than participants in the low group status condition ($M = 3.59, SD = 1.31$). Analysis of *perceived legitimacy* of the status difference revealed a main effect of Legitimacy, $F(1, 95) = 81.66, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .43$. Participants in the illegitimate condition more strongly believed that the status distinction was illegitimate ($M = 5.39, SD = 1.10$) than did participants in the legitimate condition ($M = 3.35, SD = 1.11$). Together, these results demonstrate that both manipulations were successful.

Seeking Answers

Help-seeking was analyzed in a mixed-model analysis of variance with Group Status and Legitimacy as between-subjects factors and the number of times participants spied on the outgroup and answered a question by themselves without seeking help as within-subjects factor (Help Type). The interaction between Group Status, Legitimacy, and Help Type was significant, $F(1, 95) = 11.05, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .10$. The interaction was explored with separate univariate analyses.

Analysis of the number of times participants spied on the outgroup yielded a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 95) = 6.05, p = .016, \eta_p^2 = .06$. The means are presented in Figure 2. In the low group status conditions, the

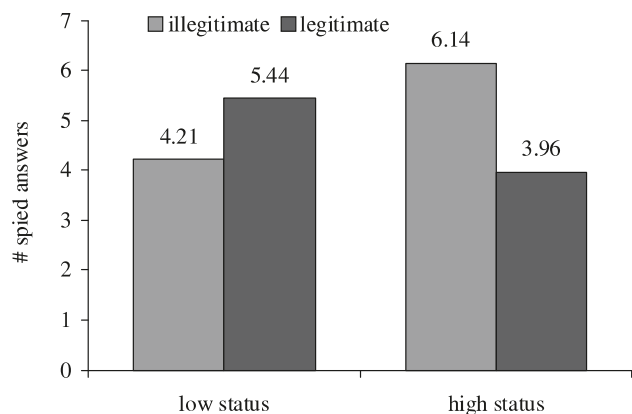


Figure 2. Number of spied answers as a function of Group Status and Legitimacy, Study 2.

difference in spying between the illegitimate and the legitimate conditions was not significant, $F(1, 95) = 1.64, ns$, but in the high group status conditions, participants with illegitimate high group status spied significantly more on the outgroup than did participants with legitimate high group status, $F(1, 95) = 4.76, p = .032, \eta_p^2 = .05$. These results thus confirm our hypothesis. We further explored this interaction by conducting tests for the simple main effect of Group Status separately in the legitimate and illegitimate conditions. This effect was marginally significant only in the illegitimate conditions, $F(1, 95) = 3.61, p = .061, \eta_p^2 = .04$. Replicating the findings of Study 1, participants with high group status spied more ($M = 6.14, SD = 4.16$) than did participants with low group status ($M = 4.21, SD = 3.44$). In the legitimate conditions, no effect of Group Status was observed, $F(1, 95) < 2.50, p > .11$.

The analysis of the number of times participants answered a question without aid also yielded a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 95) = 11.74, p = .001, \eta_p^2 = .11$ (see Figure 3). Participants in the illegitimate high group status condition answered fewer questions by themselves

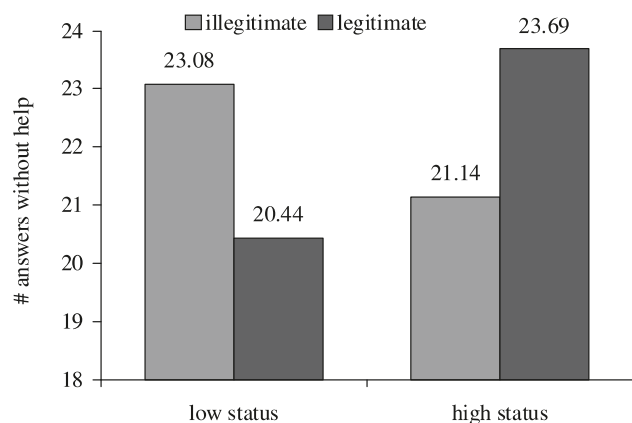


Figure 3. Number of answers given without help as a function of Group Status and Legitimacy, Study 2.

than did participants in the legitimate high group status condition, $F(1, 95) = 5.51$, $p = .021$, $\eta_p^2 = .05$. Participants in the illegitimate low group status condition answered more questions by themselves than did participants in the legitimate low group status condition, $F(1, 95) = 6.26$, $p = .014$, $\eta_p^2 = .06$.

The number of times participants requested an answer was not affected by the manipulations, as expected (all p 's $> .18$). Overall, and in replication of the findings of Study 1, participants spied significantly more answers ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 3.50$) than they requested answers ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 3.30$), $t(98) = 3.43$, $p < .001$, and both were significantly less frequent than the number of times they attempted to answer questions by themselves ($M = 22.09$, $SD = 3.95$); $t(98) = 25.55$, $p < .001$, and $t(98) = 29.79$, $p < .001$, respectively.

Discussion

Study 2 directly compared preferences for requesting help and spying on the outgroup when the status differential between groups was legitimate or illegitimate. We have suggested that group members are more likely to accept the status quo when the existing status differential is legitimate. Consistent with this, when status relations were legitimate, different preferences for requesting help or spying were not evident among members of low and high status groups. By contrast, status relations viewed as illegitimate emphasize the potential for changes in the existing status hierarchy (Ellemers et al., 1993). Such changes are associated with the possible loss of their current advantaged position for members of high status groups and more with a possible improvement of their current disadvantaged position for members of low status groups (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). We therefore expected that the illegitimate conditions would be more demanding for members of high as compared to low status groups.

Supporting this reasoning, members of high status groups were more willing to spy than to request help from the outgroup when the status differential was illegitimate. As expected, no preference for spying or requesting help was evident among members of low status groups. The pattern of results found for the illegitimate conditions replicates the findings of Study 1 and attests to the notion that possible changes to the existing status hierarchy are more demanding for members of high compared to low status groups.

General Discussion

The present research investigated determinants of the motivation to spy on and to request help from an outgroup. As researchers point out, "intellectual content has become the major factor in comparative trade advantage" (Vorster &

Nel, 1995; p. 52). Yet we know relatively little about when, why, and how members of high and low status groups fall back on the intellectual resources of other groups. Prior research showed that strategic motives can guide the provision of help to outgroups (Hopkins et al., 2007; Nadler, 2002; van Leeuwen, 2007; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010). The studies presented in the current paper provide empirical evidence for the impact of strategic motives on requests for resources in intergroup contexts. In two experiments, we tested the notion that the prospect of change to the status hierarchy elicits a greater motivation to spy on than to request help from an outgroup among members of high compared to low status groups.

Study 1 compared the amount of requests for help and spying between experimentally created high and low status groups when the existing status hierarchy was subject to change. As expected, the preference to spy on versus to request help from the outgroup was more pronounced among members of the high than among the low status group. Study 1 thus supported the notion that members of high status groups experience potential changes to the status hierarchy as more demanding. As a consequence, they are more aware of the potential damage to their public image that is inherent to requesting help from a lower status outgroup. Study 2 directly compared preferences for requesting help and spying between groups that had an experimentally created legitimate and illegitimate high or low status. Because illegitimacy indicates that existing status differences are insecure (Ellemers et al., 1993; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we expected that members of high status groups would prefer spying over requesting help in the illegitimate, but not in the legitimate, conditions. The results supported this notion: When the status differential was legitimate, the amount of spied and requested answers did not differ between members of high and low status groups. Conversely, when the status differential was illegitimate, members of high, but not of low, status groups preferred spying over requesting help. Taken together, both studies supported the prediction that a preference for ways to benefit from the outgroup's resources without jeopardizing the ingroup's public image is more pronounced among members of high than among low status groups when status relations are insecure.

The experimental paradigm used allowed us to address the question whether preferences for spying are specific for members of high status groups. One might argue that our results basically show evidence for the willingness of high status groups to exploit low status groups. Recent research suggests that members of high status groups might feel entitled to take advantage of the system that surrounds them and that is being dominated by ingroup members who might turn a blind eye to nonnormative measures to protect high group status (Saguy, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2008; Saguy, Pratto, Dovidio, & Nadler, 2009). However, our data do not lend support to a general tendency for "sinful" behavior among members of high status groups. We directly compared the effects of secure and insecure status positions on

preferences to spy over requesting help in Study 2. Consistent with expectations, this preference was evident only when illegitimacy of the advantaged status position indicated that changes to the status hierarchy are feasible.

We did, however, find a general preference for spying over requesting help in both studies. This is not surprising, given that also members of low status groups can be expected to be concerned about their group's resources and public image. However, compared to members of high status groups, members of low status groups experience the prospect of change regarding the status hierarchy as less demanding than members of high status groups (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2005). Therefore, we argued that they feel a lesser need to secure their group's resources and its public image simultaneously. Findings of Study 2 support this notion by showing that members of the high status group spied significantly more when the potential for changes in the status hierarchy was high (i.e., when status relations were illegitimate), compared to when it was low (i.e., when status relations were legitimate). By contrast, the amount of spied answers was not affected by the legitimacy of status relations among members of the low status group.

Importantly, the observed lower motivation to fall back on the outgroup's resources does not indicate that members of low status groups do not take up their chance for change. The model of intergroup helping relations as power relations (Nadler, 2002) provides a theoretical framework to interpret the low status groups' behavior. Central to this framework is the notion that the willingness to seek help communicates agreement with the lower status position of the ingroup. Therefore, by means of *not* falling back on the outgroup's resources, members of the lower status group can communicate their disagreement with the existing status hierarchy. The number of answers participants gave without falling back on the outgroup supports this interpretation: Members of the low status group solved significantly more questions without help when status relations were illegitimate, thereby demonstrating their independence from the higher status outgroup's intellectual resources.

An alternative explanation for our results might be that participants acted on norms that they inferred from the study contexts. Specifically, participants in the low status groups might have concluded that requesting answers from the high status outgroup is the normative way to act. Conversely, participants in the high status groups might have concluded that requesting answers from the low status outgroup is not particularly beneficial. Such a rationale would have been evident in a main effect of group status, with members of low status groups generally requesting more resources from members of high status groups than vice versa. Such an effect, however, was not evident in the studies.

The results of both studies support the assumption that members of high and low status groups react very differently to challenges of the current status hierarchy. This is

consistent with research demonstrating that members of high and low status groups differ substantially in their goals and needs (Bergsieker, Shelton, & Richeson, 2010; Shnabel, Nadler, Ullrich, Dovidio, & Carmi, 2009). Bergsieker and colleagues (Bergsieker et al., 2010), for instance, showed that, in interracial encounters, members of majority groups want to be liked by the minority group, whereas members of the minority group want to be respected by the majority group. Thus, members of majority and minority groups pursue very different goals in the same situation. In a similar vein, Shnabel and his colleagues (Shnabel et al., 2009) showed that members of victimized groups have different needs than members of perpetrator groups in reconciliation contexts: Whereas the victims are in need of empowerment, the perpetrators are in need of acceptance. Both groups were more willing to reconcile when they perceived that their respective needs had been satisfied (Shnabel et al., 2009). The demands that possible changes to the status hierarchy elicit especially for members of advantaged groups have also been addressed in research by Saguy and colleagues (2008, 2009). Their studies show that members of advantaged groups are particularly motivated to talk about commonalities between their group and the disadvantaged group. According to the authors, emphasizing commonalities between the groups implies that nothing needs to change regarding their respective positions in the status hierarchy (Saguy et al., 2008, 2009). Our research takes this one step further by showing that the prospect of changes to the status hierarchy directly impacts on behavior.

To conclude, precisely because today's world is changing so rapidly do we need a better understanding of how members of high and low status groups react to possible changes in the status hierarchy. Events such as the global financial crisis affect nations worldwide, and they challenge existing status hierarchies. Our findings indicate that these situations elicit a high motivation to secure their advantaged position among members of high status groups – with or without consent of the lower status outgroup. Our studies complement prior research on the strategic motives that come into play in the provision of help between groups (Hopkins et al., 2007; Nadler & Halabi, 2006; Nadler et al., 2009; van Leeuwen & Täuber, 2010) by showing that strategic motives also affect requests for resources from outgroups. The research presented here suggests that members of high status groups are aware of the difficult choice between securing their group's relative standing and securing their group's public image: It appears that high group status can indeed sometimes become a burden.

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Susanne Täuber

Department of Social Psychology
University of Groningen
Grote Kruisstraat 2/1
9712 TS Groningen
The Netherlands
E-mail s.tauber@rug.nl